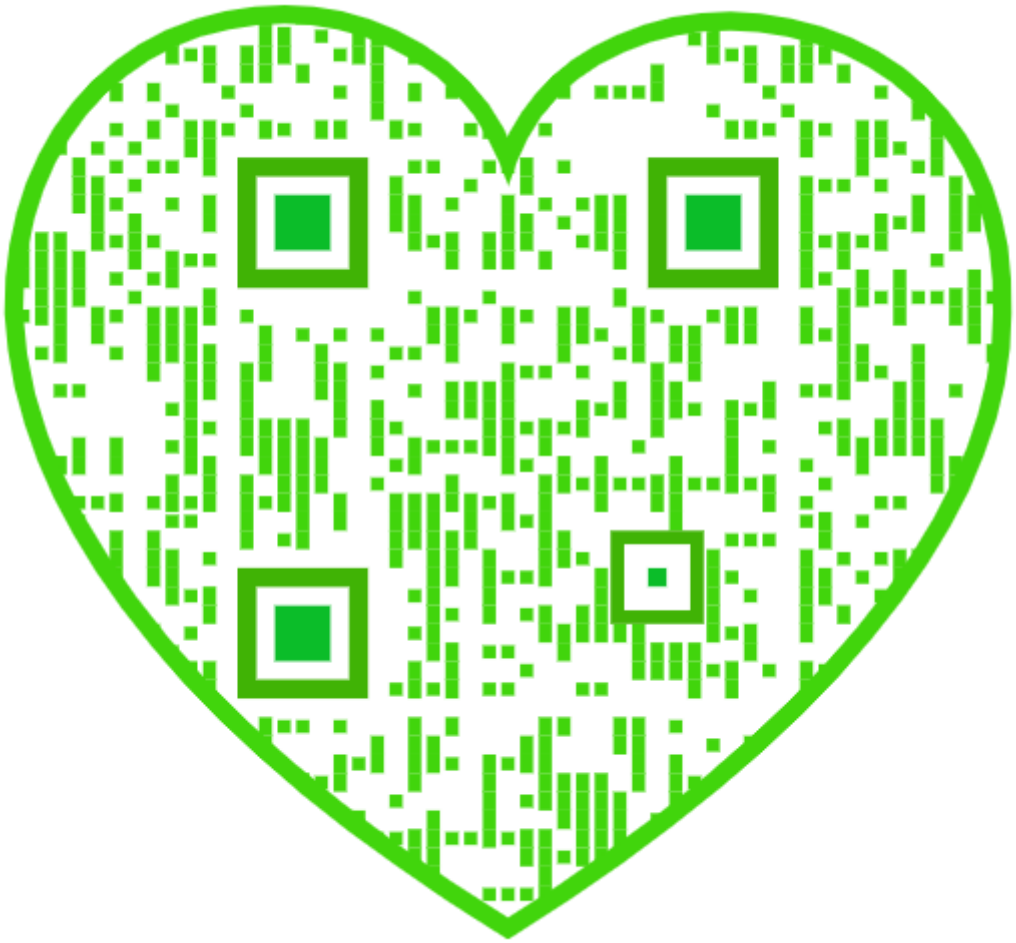

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LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE GRADES

BY

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HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN & COMPANY
BOSTON NEW YORK
CHICAGO

Mar. 11, 1905
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PUBLISHERS' NOTE.

THIS paper on Language Teaching in the Grades has been prepared by Mrs. Cooley at our request, and is published for distribution among superintendents and teachers who are especially interested in that branch of school work.

Mrs. Cooley is a practical as well as a theoretical believer in the use of literature as an essential element of vital language teaching, and has had exceptional opportunity, as Supervisor of Primary Work in the Minneapolis Public Schools, to plan and organize a language course based on such use, and to observe its working. The excellent results achieved in those schools aroused a very general interest in her theories and methods, and requests for papers on the subject came to her from important educational associations. In compliance with such requests papers were prepared and presented at the general session of the National Educational Association at Charleston in 1900, at the meeting of the Minnesota State Educational Association at St. Paul in 1902, at the meeting of the Department of Superintendence of the N. E. A. at Cincinnati in 1903, and at the Summer School of the South at Knoxville in 1904. The papers read before the two National Associations will be found in the published proceedings of those meetings.

The papers presented at educational meetings were largely devoted to the discussion of the general principles of language training. Excerpts from one or more of them appear in the present paper, but it has been planned to treat here the real problems which must be worked out in actual experience. Its object will be accomplished if it affords helpful suggestion to the superintendents and teachers who are now working out those problems in their own schools.

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LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE GRADES.

THE speech of one who talks much and says little is but "as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal," though every word be correctly used and every sentence faultless in construction. Fluency and precision of speech may be gained at the expense of language power. It clearly follows that instructing children in the use of language forms is not the vital part of language teaching. True language training is giving skill in self-expression: the expression of the individual's own experiences, — his own thoughts, his own feelings, his own way of looking at things; skill in expressing them in terms of simplicity, sincerity, and effectiveness.

To teach language is to rouse, stimulate, and guide twofold activity in the pupil: (1) *thinking;* (2) *giving his thought to others.*

The natural stimulus of every phase of human activity is the ideal that takes hold of the mind and heart; and the effectiveness of that activity in each individual depends upon the strength of his purpose and the degree of effort he puts forth; these in turn depend upon the vividness and potency of the stimulating idea. The word *ideal* means

idea plus *desire to attain* — the prerequisites of all real attainment. The teacher of language, therefore, should: (1) present ideals — stir the thought and feeling which generate the desire to express; and (2) provide for and guide the practice in striving to reach these ideals.

In the study of any art, response to truth and beauty must always precede and accompany successful efforts to attain truthful and beautiful expression. Teachers of music, of drawing, and of painting, build on this principle. Why should there be divorce of practice from ideals in this one great universal art of language? To be sure, there is no skill without repeated doing; but it is equally certain that the product of low ideals and weak thought is valueless, be it ever so perfect mechanically. One must constantly put forth his own efforts, but he must as constantly look to his ideals. George Eliot voiced what every human being feels when she said, — "For my part, people who do anything finely always inspire me to try. I don't mean that they make me believe that I can do it as well as they, but they make the things seem worthy to be done."

Whatever art is studied, two fundamental principles must be recognized: (1) that the subtle influence of vital contact with the best expressions of that art moulds the student's efforts into finer

quality and form; (2) that his own striving to express himself enables him to attain better appreciation of the work of the artist. Literature is the highest form of expression of the language arts; and the right use of the right literature is, therefore, the basis of all really effective and vital language teaching.

This use of literature is not as a setting of the copy. A necessary element of art is that it shall be an expression of the individual's own way of seeing, feeling, and doing; and this means neither imitation nor reproduction. A great poem should never be paraphrased. A story in verse, not a poem, may be rewritten in prose form; and a real poem or a bit of fine prose may be copied for various purposes related to vocabulary or standards of form; but literature as the natural basis of language lessons serves a far greater end. It should suggest and recall, illumine and interpret, the child's own personal experiences, which he is later to tell in speech or in writing as expressing himself. He does, truly, "enjoy in his books a delightful dress-rehearsal of experience;" but it must not be forgotten that it is his own personal experience which is dressed for the rehearsal.

The first essential of success in teaching English is this large conception in the teacher's mind of the value and significance of the work. If he con-

ceives it to be merely instruction in the use of language forms, the result will inevitably bear the stamp of the mechanical. If, on the other hand, his conscious purpose is to enlarge and deepen the thought and feeling to be expressed, and at the same time to develop technical accuracy, skill, and worthier form, the result will be vital.

And this large conception must be in the heart as well as in the mind of the teacher. Scientific observation has proved that all mental growth beyond a certain rudimentary stage depends absolutely on self-expression — on finding fit utterance for the vague thought or feeling that cannot take shape or body until in language it comes to birth. But it is possible to know the recorded scientific fact without realizing its importance or bearing. Only when the feeling which accompanies such realization is woven into the fibre of this intellectual knowledge is its dynamic force felt in language teaching. The story of Hellen Keller's life impresses the feeling of the value of open avenues of expression, more forcibly than can any statement of scientist or philosopher. Her life is itself a book in which God has so written this great truth that it makes powerful appeal to the heart of the reader as well as to his intellect.

Again, the conception of *the teacher's part* in this development of language power will determine

the character of the teaching. We pour new life-currents into our work when we not merely know as a fact, but assimilate as a truth the thought of Carlyle: "How can an inanimate, mechanical, gerund-grinder foster the growth of anything; much more of mind, which grows not like the vegetable (by having its roots littered by etymological compost), but like a Spirit, — by mysterious contact of Spirit." Helen Keller, with the marvelous language power that characterizes her to-day, is a concrete illustration of this message. Miss Sullivan, the rare teacher of this rare soul, says: "Helen learned language by being brought in contact with living language itself, brought for the purpose of furnishing themes of thought and of filling her mind with beautiful pictures and inspiring ideals." She adds: "I have always observed that children invariably delight in lofty, poetic language, which we are too ready to think beyond their comprehension."

How will these large conceptions of language and language teaching in the mind of the teacher be manifested in his work? First of all, in the selection, presentation, and further use of the ideals found in literature.

Of himself, by his own observing, imaging, and thinking, the child learns many things about the world in which he lives; he vaguely feels many of

the truths of life; he is even able to tell others much of what he sees. But in literature he finds the thought of those who have seen more, felt more deeply, and expressed themselves more effectively. Here he finds not only inspiration, but also models of form.

Words have a marvelous power over the mind, and especially over the young mind; it is peculiarly susceptible to suggestion. It is often said that "the child thinks by means of images." Words cause living pictures to glow on the sensitive film of his brain. But no two children respond to the same words with the same mental pictures; not a child paints the exact picture in the mind of the speaker or writer. The result for each individual is a series of pictures with familiar setting, suggested and colored by the word-picture of another.

A "Random Memory" of Robert Louis Stevenson's forcibly illustrates the child's habit of weaving the web of a poem or a story into his own life: —

"Rummaging in the dusty pigeonholes of memory, I came once upon a graphic version of the famous psalm 'The Lord is my Shepherd;' and from the places employed in its illustration, which are all in the neighborhood of the house then occupied by my father, I am able to date it before the seventh year of my age. The 'pastures green' were represented by a certain suburban

stubble field where I had once walked with my nurse under an autumnal sunset. . . . Here, in the fleecy person of the sheep, I seemed myself to follow something unseen, unrealized, and yet benignant; and close by the sheep in which I was incarnated — as if for greater security — rustled the skirts of my nurse. 'Death's dark vale' was a certain archway in the Warriston cemetery. . . . Here I beheld myself some paces ahead (seeing myself, I mean, from behind) utterly alone in that uncanny passage; on the one side of me a rude, knobby shepherd's staff, on the other a rod like a billiard cue, appeared to accompany my progress; the staff sturdily upright, the billiard cue inclined confidentially, like one whispering, toward my ear. I was aware — I will never tell you how — that the presence of these articles afforded me encouragement. . . . In this string of pictures I believe the gist of the psalm to have consisted; I believe it had no more to say to me; and the result was consolatory. I would go to sleep dwelling with restfulness upon these images. . . . I had already singled out one lovely verse — a scarce conscious joy in childhood, in age a companion thought: —

> In pastures green Thou leadest me
> The quiet waters by."

The man who thus exquisitely repainted these pictures stored away in the "dusty pigeonholes of his memory," had three great gifts: vivid memories of childhood experiences, the heart of a child to interpret them, and the creative ability to bring

them forth. He thus lays bare many universal feelings of childhood as he reads the emotions in his own soul.

One of these feelings, — the quick response to the music and rhythm of words, — Stevenson recalls as follows: "'The Lord is gone up with a shout, and God with the sound of a trumpet' rings still in my ears from my first childhood, and, perhaps, with something of my nurse's accent. There was possibly some sort of image written in my mind by these loud words, but I believe the words themselves were what I cherished. I must have been taught the love of beautiful sounds before I was breeched." The little girl who told of her love for "the singing sounds of the verses" in Longfellow's "Psalm of Life" and Wordsworth's "Daffodils" said the same thing in another way. Both spoke for *the* child, as well as for *a* child.

These memories of Stevenson's also suggest the grievous sins that have been committed against children, and, we might add, against literature. The so-called literature, rewritten, "written down" to the assumed mental level of the child, shows misunderstanding of the essential qualities of great literature and of the minds of children. The truth is that it is only the master mind that is great enough to touch the child heart. For real literature

expresses the soul of the writer; and that soul is greatest which has "become as a child." This is not saying that all great literature is suitable nourishment for the young mind; it is saying that all suitable literature for the young mind is great literature. It is the range, not the quality, of thought and emotion that is limited by experience.

The literature that touches the heart of the child appeals to his imagination and stirs his emotions by suggesting and reviving his own experiences; it appeals to his love of action. It must touch his loves, his hates, his aspirations, his fears, his joys, his griefs. It must penetrate his world of make-believe, and touch the every-day objects of the every-day world with the wand of fancy, — playing with their similarities and resemblances, — personifying sticks and stones, sun, moon, and stars, and even the phenomena and forces of nature. If things do not "come alive" in the outer world, they must be made alive in the inner world; must "move about and do things." The richer the imagery, the more vivid the word painting, the greater his delight. Surely these are characteristics of great literature; of great poets and prose writers.

Such names as Homer and Shakespeare suggest to many people a field of literature into which the young may not, cannot, enter. This belief is quite analogous to that of the child of the city slums,

who "always thought grass was something to keep off of." Both misconceptions are pathetic. The children themselves, regardless of the false theories of their elders, have shown that Homer touches their heartstrings as does no modern writer of "stories and verses for the young." Hugh Miller, the man, writing of Hugh Miller, the boy under ten years of age, says: —

"Old Homer wrote admirably for little folk, especially in the Odyssey; a copy of which, . . . in Pope's translation, I found in the house of a neighbor. Next came the Iliad. . . . With what power and at how early an age, genius impresses! I saw, even at this immature period, that no other writer could cast a javelin with half the force of Homer."

To-day, in many primary schools, we find children entranced and their own lives lifted above the commonplace by the stories of the old Greek heroes; and in many a grammar school parts of translations of the Iliad and the Odyssey are read with keenest zest.

The child, by no means ready for a play of Shakespeare's, listens with delight to such a burst of song as

"Hark, hark! the lark at heaven's gate sings,
And Phœbus 'gins arise,
His steeds to water at those springs
On chaliced flowers that lies;

And winking Mary-buds begin
To ope their golden eyes :
With everything that pretty bin,
My lady sweet, arise :
Arise, arise."

Must he wait until he can fully understand the significance of "chaliced" before he can see Phœbus arise to water his steeds? see the "winking Mary-buds" "ope their golden eyes?" Must he be deprived of the pictures and the music because we do not nowadays say, "that pretty bin?"

Many another old English poet gives us gems of real child literature. Edmund Spenser may be quoted as an example. We find in his verse music, vivid word painting, color, rich imagery, personification, action, and the simplicity resulting from living close to Nature in loving intimacy. "We wander at will amidst this endless variety of incident, of figures, all steeped in the colors of the imagination, without being reminded that there are bounds to the world we have entered," writes one who knows this poet well. True, the "Færie Queene" as a whole is not for the grades; but what of such extracts from it as the one given below? This particular quotation is given because it has been so often happily used in the intermediate grades, with children from homes of all degrees of culture and from homes barren of all culture.

"Then came the Autumn all in yellow clad,
As though he joyed in his plenteous store,
Laden with fruits that made him laugh, full glad
That he had banished hunger . . .

. . . . . .

Upon his head a wreath, that was enrolled
With ears of corn of every sort, he bore;
And in his hand a sickle he did hold,
To reap the ripening fruits the earth had yold."

One might write, "In autumn the earth looks yellow. It has brought forth ripened fruit and grain, and now we gather the harvest to keep us from getting hungry in the winter." There would then be no unfamiliar word, and the child would surely get the facts. But would we exchange the poet's beautiful word picture for this literal statement? Both preserve the same familiar characteristics of autumn, — the ripened fruits, the vivid yellow coloring, the harvest; — but the poet embodies them in a personified autumn, such as the child loves to picture; and he feels the spirit of the season as a child feels it.

Does any one believe that a child cannot image Spenser's Autumn and share his joyous spirit, because the words "clad," "laden," "enrolled," and "yold" are not in the every-day vocabulary? The boy, Robert Louis Stevenson, knew nothing of the theology of the Twenty-third Psalm, nor did he comprehend the exact meaning of many of its

words. But "the result was consolatory;" he went to sleep "dwelling with restfulness upon these images." The "scarce conscious joy of childhood" was a "companion thought of age." Does not many an adult who can explain the meanings of all the words, at least to his own satisfaction, possess less of the real meaning and spirit of the psalm?

Literature, as a basis of language training, has many uses besides the inspirational: it is a means of cultivating the ear; of enriching the vocabulary; of developing the feeling for a choice word, an apt phrase, and a well-constructed sentence. To attempt to limit the selections to the familiar vocabulary or the commonplace expressions would violate the principles of literature, of teaching, and of the nature of children. Even a certain quaintness of diction has a charm. For example, boys and girls of the intermediate grades delight in hearing selections from Lanier's "Malory's King Arthur" if the teacher reads them well. Such selections interpreted by a good reader add much to the ear training so essential to appreciation and good use of English.

It may be well to emphasize here the importance of this special phase of language teaching. Much beautiful literature should come to the pupil through the ear. The words of many a poem should so

sing themselves through the ear into the brain of the child that he shall hear in his heart both message and music " long after they are heard no more " by the outer ear. And so the teacher's reading of literature is necessarily an important factor of every phase of language teaching, including the teaching of oral reading. That it may be the best literature for the pupils at that time, it should be selected by one who has the wide knowledge of literature that is born of years of familiarity, and who has the sympathy with children that means loving insight. That it may make its deepest impression, the reader should fully appreciate its meaning and beauty, aud be able by his sympathetic reading to interpret that meaning and beauty to others.

The following sketch of one teacher's happy and profitable use of " Snow-Bound " illustrates the points that have been made. It is typical of a set of more than a hundred such reports sent to the writer by as many teachers in third and fourth grades. This one came from a school where most of the pupils are the children of laboring men, many of them foreigners. The teacher wrote: —

" I found the following to be the most successful plan of studying ' small wholes ' from ' Snow-Bound : ' a short preparatory talk, then my reading the selection without comment, followed by general discussion with free ques-

tions; then re-reading, the oftener the better. Sometimes the children listened silently and drew the pictures. Lastly, they chose the lines they liked best and wanted to learn, and in that way we committed sixty lines. Here are a few of their comments: 'I like it because we used to live on a farm.' 'I like it because I have n't lived on a farm, and I 'd like to.' 'I like "Snow-Bound" because it seems so much like home and when we have storms.' 'I like where the old folks told them stories about when they were children.' 'Where the mother was praying that no one should want for warmth and food.' 'The part where they were doing things and the mother was knitting and they were telling stories.' 'After the storm was over, where the boys went out and cut through the drifts to get to the barn.' 'Where the animals were mad because their breakfast was so long in coming to them.' One boy said, 'Seems as if I can't keep from saying "Snow-Bound" all the time.'

Like Stevenson, these children used the reader's pictures to bring their own to light; and then it became a pleasure to tell of their own home circle, their own home experiences, and of experiences they would like to have, and to memorize the beautiful, vivid pictures of the poet. They had something to say and were eager to say it, — the first two requisites of effective oral and written composition.

Up to this point we have discussed only one manifestation of the large conception of the significance of language teaching, namely, the appreciation of the value of literature as a basis. Let us briefly consider a few other results.

There will be respect for the individuality of the pupil. Though the teacher will kindle with the live coal and, later, trim the flame, he will keep his hands off and his tongue tied while each pupil tells of his own seeing, imaging, thinking, and feeling.

There will be interest on the part of the pupil. Lack of interest in oral or written composition is a sign that the real boy or girl has not been touched. Any form of activity that expresses one's self is accompanied by a sense of joy.

There will be, also, recognition of the unity of the variously named lessons in the language group. In the schools of Germany the German language is studied as one subject, not cut up into sections. One finds on their schedules, — not literature, reading, rhetoric, language, spelling, — but German, which includes all these. It may not be a disadvantage to think of these recitations by their specific characters, but teacher and pupils should clearly recognize them all as only different phases of the study of English.

The reading lesson should be a reading of literature. It should furnish not only the inspiration,

but a part of the material for the language lesson. The reading and language periods may well be considered as two halves of one whole. The personal thought and feeling stirred in the one should find opportunity for further expression in the other. While there can be no reading of literature without language training, there may well be a time known as the language period, so named because its specific purpose is *effective use* of language. By means of the reading lesson, completed by the language lesson, the child should not only grow in knowledge and appreciation of the best things written in English, but also in mastery of form and ability to speak and write more effectively. And the best forms of expression found in the reading lesson should be used as standards and models for the practice exercises needed.

The spelling lessons should include the writing from dictation of sentences, stanzas, and paragraphs. These should be models of form: they should be related in thought to the other lessons of the language group; they should be used to teach with spelling capitalization, and the character and use of punctuation marks; — in short, to teach "the mechanics of written language" and the correct spelling of words. These are never separated in use outside the schoolroom, and the habit should be formed of visualizing them in one picture. The

lists of words, the sentences, the paragraphs, should all have direct bearing on both the thought and the form of the next oral or written composition.

There will necessarily be recitation periods devoted to class criticisms and corrections of dictation work and of oral and written composition. The standards must be usage of good writers.

There should be drawing and constructive lessons also, given to illustrate and impress ideas that are suggested by the reading lesson and expressed in words in the language lesson.

Such unity of purpose and plan in the treatment of the several subjects of the language group is dictated by good pedagogy — another name for common sense.

There remain to be noted as necessary factors in language teaching, the exercises for gaining skill by repeated correct doing. To do this part of the work well, requires thorough, accurate, systematized knowledge of the use of forms; it also requires careful planning to give the pupils the systematic practice needed. Nothing but persistent oral repetition of the correct form will overcome the habit of using incorrect, ungrammatical, and inelegant expressions in daily speech. These are matters of ear training and of motor habits, as well as of knowledge. As long as errors persist in a person's speech, they will persist in what he writes when

full of his subject. The cure for such faults, then, whether of speech or writing, is in oral repetition. Exercises for this purpose should be conversational; the more of a game element in them, the better; they may, at times, be somewhat gymnastic in their nature. They should be short, lively, and practiced daily.

But this habit of correct usage should be an increasingly intelligent usage. The following general plan for the daily practice exercises is recommended as sound in principle and serviceable in practice: (1) provide for exercises that require correct use of a form commonly misused; (2) call attention to the form used and the manner of using it; (3) secure repetition of the correct form; (4) ask pupils to tell what form has been used and how it was used; (5) lead to a simple statement of a direction for its use; (6) require further repetition to fix habit. This plan may be followed in the study of written forms in the dictation exercises as well as with the oral exercises.

To what extent shall technical grammar be called to our aid in teaching language?

In the primary grades the child is entirely engaged with the art, the using. There should be no thought of forcing upon him even the terms of the science. As his power increases and his study of language naturally and gradually deepens, he be-

gins to appreciate a sentence as a thought unit; he advances to the study of the larger elements of this thought unit; and by the time he reaches the fifth or sixth grade he is ready to use intelligently the terms "subject" and "predicate." Similarly, his study of words is gradually giving him greater understanding of their various uses, and he begins to group them according to their uses in the sentence. When he understands that for which a term stands, he should use the term as naturally as he names the parts of a flower when he is familiar with those parts as special organs of the flower. There seems to be no halfway place for the home-made, makeshift word to be used as a substitute for the accepted term. For example, when the pupil has grouped the words used "to name," why belittle him by giving him a made-up word, while we reserve the word "noun" for the next grade? By the end of the fifth or the sixth grade, he should have grown to use intelligently the names of the parts of speech, as he uses any other words that have grown into his vocabulary in the natural way, — by use as needed to express ideas.

But these terms are not taught as elements of the science, the logic, of Grammar. They have, rather, as his thinking and knowledge grew, been given to supply a needed, exact vocabulary. By means of its use he can much more clearly, simply,

and directly state the principal rules and directions governing the use of language forms ; and here, as everywhere else, clearer expression helps to clear the thought. Though the foundation is thus laid for the study of Grammar, it is not at this time for the sake of Grammar ; it is for the sake of its contribution to language power.

When, by this gradual growth, — in thought, in vocabulary, and in appreciation of some of the underlying principles, — the time arrives for systematic study of the structure of the language, the study of English naturally divides into two lines: grammar, which is followed by the study of logic and other related subjects ; and literature and composition, which are to be a lifelong study and delight. But the analysis of thought required by an understanding of grammar as an organized body of principles is difficult for the immature and untrained mind. This branch of study should under no circumstances be attempted before the seventh grade, and it may well be deferred until the eighth ; and, in these grades, only the elements of the science can be studied with profit.

A systematic, progressive course in English, from the kindergarten to and through the high school course, evidently demands the careful selection, collection, preparation, and arrangement of material, and the careful planning of exercises, that

involve years of study and of time. It implies a series of text-books embodying the results of these years of experience. But with the best available series of books, much which only he can do remains to be done by each individual teacher. The books should suggest, inspire, give practical help, supply much material, and provide a consistently progressive plan of work; but there always remains as the essential, the teacher's individual initiative and personal ability.

Experience in all grades, both with and without text-books, has led to certain definite opinions regarding the use of text-books by the pupils. It seems clear that during the first three or four years of school life the teacher is the best medium for presenting what is to be taught. Here, then, the teaching should be largely oral, and a formal text-book in the hands of the pupil may do more harm than good. The reading books should furnish much good material, and this may be supplemented by the use of pictures, blackboard, and chart. But in the intermediate and higher grades, assuming that the teachers have the requisite knowledge and experience, they have not the time to get and prepare the larger amount of material required; nor should it be necessary for them to write so many lessons on the blackboard. Moreover, much of the best material is not at hand.

Again, the pupil who has entered the fourth or the fifth grade has reached the age when he should think from the printed page; when he should be held responsible for different lessons, to be thought out by and of himself. It is especially important in this study that he absorb much by reading and re-reading "to himself." It is the almost universal experience that when language work is attempted beyond the third or the fourth grade without books in the hands of the children, it tends to degenerate into a series of unrelated and more or less mechanical exercises.

The principles presented in this paper may be summarized in a general plan of language teaching, as follows: —

A group of language lessons related in thought:

(1) Pupils reading, and listening to the teacher's reading, of something that has both interest and literary value;

(2) Thoughts and observations about the personal observations and experiences suggested by the poem or story read;

(3) Short daily conversation for the specific purpose of perfecting accuracy in the use of grammatical forms and constructions;

(4) Dictation spelling lessons—daily exercises in copying and writing from dictation,—of sentences, stanzas, and paragraphs, in which special

attention is given to the study and use of correct forms in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and arrangement;

(5) *The final outcome,—the flowering and fruitage of the group of lessons,—the pupil's telling or writing about something he himself has seen, done, heard, thought, felt, or imagined, suggested by the poem or story;*

(6) *Helpful class criticisms and corrections.*

ALICE WOODWORTH COOLEY.

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA.
January 7, 1905.

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